

Ending of legend “Forty years”



Lev Tolstoy

The ending of the Little Russian legend "Forty years", published by Kostomarov in 1881.

Since this first night, from 12th to 13th of August, when he (the killer), after talking with his son, went to sleep alone in his room, his punishment began.

"There is no God, no soul, no punishment! So good, so peaceful! And how much and for how long I was torturing myself in vain. We all fight each other, all crush each other, to live, as Alexander said. Struggle for existence: that's the law! And there is no other. And God permitted me to be a winner. God permitted! I still have this stupid habit. Not God permitted, but I managed to be a winner; and that's why I feel good. Everyone, fight; and who wins, use the victory! I won and use it. I used to live well, only the recollection was poisoning; but now it will be even better, completely good. I understand that they are jealous (he remembered the words of the priest). They're jealous: everyone wants that. And if you want, then strive. You yourself fight, and don't wait for them to give you the victory. And Alexander... "

He remembered what Alexander told him the other day, that earning twenty thousand a year was too little. He asked to add him ten thousand, and when he refused, he was unhappy.

"Suppose he expects to have everything after I die."

And suddenly it occurred to Trofim Semenovich very clearly that his son must have wished for his death.

"Fight, to be a winner. I struggled – and killed the merchant; I needed his death, and I took his life. And he, my son Alexander, whose death does he need? "

He stopped and half raised on his bed in horror.

"Whose death? - Mine! - Yes, I stay on his way. No matter how much I would give him, it'd be better if I died and he'd be the landlord".

And Trofim began to recollect the views and words of his son, and everything pointed out that his son desired his death. And couldn't not to desire.

"And if he desires – an educated person, who doesn't have superstitions - then he must kill me. Suppose, he doesn't want to ruin himself. But there is poison!"

And suddenly he remembered a conversation where his son talked about ancient poisons that kill so that traces can't be found.

"And if he will have this poison, why wouldn't he give it to me? He has to give!"

"He already said that I run business poorly, he told, that more could be done. Yes, a cup of tea - and it's over! Bribe people, chef, they're all corrupt."

He began to recollect his valet-beau.

"Give this one a thousand rubles - and it's done, and to the cook, too."

Trofim became anxious, thinking this, and, to settle down, wanted to drink a glass of sugary water standing on the table near his bed. He took the glass in hand: it was something white on the bottom of it. "Who knows what it is? - No, can't fool me!" - He said and poured the water out; then he came to the tap and drank water from it. "Yes, a fight of all against all. And if decide to fight, then be on alert: I'll be more careful. I'll drink and eat what wife will have... Yes, she, too. She knows that she will get the seventh part. And her broke relatives demand that from her for a long time. Yes, war, so be war! Need to position myself so that they don't gain from my death. Need to write a will that would deprive them from everything, so that my death would be unprofitable to them. Yes, tomorrow I will do this and will announce them."

He wanted to fall asleep, but thoughts did not let him sleep. He began to compose a testament. He put on his bathrobe and shoes, came to the table and began to write a draft of the testament, in which he gave all his possessions to charitable institutions. After finishing it, he wanted to lay down; but then a

thought came to him about his lackey, janitor. He transferred himself into the soul of the lackey and told himself: "What if I was a poor lackey, made fifteen rubles per month, and had a rich man with money slept just five rooms away from me, and if I firmly knew, as I know now, that there is no God, and there is no Judgement. What would I do? I would do what I did with the merchant. And Trofim felt fear; he got up again and started locking his door, but the latch didn't work, so he barricaded the door with an armchair, tied it with a towel to the door handle, and put one armchair on top of the other, for it to rattle. Only then he put out candle and slept for so long that his wife started to worry and went to open the door. Chairs fell and rattled, Trofim jumped up, frightened, pale.

"Anyone? What? Help!" – He even yelled and couldn't recover for a while. Upon awaking, it seemed to him that someone came to kill him. When he came to his senses, he said that he barricaded out of caution, and tried to hide his fear; but no matter how much he tried, since that day both relatives and servants began to notice a big change in him. Before he was sometimes joyful, sometimes angry, sometimes affectionate and kind, sometimes sad when he was thinking about his sin. Before he disliked some, loved others, especially his children-grandchildren. Now, however, he was always the same, always silent, careful, looked with suspicion at everyone, and with everyone, even with his children, was equally cold. The testament became his main occupation since then. For long time, he couldn't come up with that one which he wanted. All lawyers, who visited him in regards to this case, could not please him. He wrote and rewrote, and changed. In food, he also became particularly picky. Sometimes, he left the most delicious and his favorite dishes without tasting them, often refused from lunch and came in the middle of a mealtime and took an initiated plate from his son or daughter or wife, and only then ate. The wine he bought himself and kept in the cupboard in his room. He engaged less in business; but when he did, he always hid his profits and how much he received from the family. The money, which gave him so much joy before, now only tormented him. He tried to protect the money from others but felt that it's not possible to protect it from those people who have no God, like he was. He felt that if everyone learns what he knows and what his son knows, that there's no God nor the Judgement, then no powers will protect him. They'll kill him, poison, take his possessions

through deception or force. He had only one salvation: not to show people what he knows, that there is no God nor the Judgement, but rather convince them, that there is God, that there is Judgement. And therefore the last change, which happened to Trofim after August 12, was that he became a remarkably devout, which he wasn't in his entire life. He did not miss a single service, fasted all the posts, Wednesdays and Fridays, and never missed an opportunity to convince his family, and his friends, and his servants, that there is God and his law, and that those who will not abide by it, will perish and will be severely punished in the future life. He instilled this even into his son, pretending that he forgot all he spoke with him, or pretending that he repented that.

From that time, August 12, when he reassured himself that he has nothing and nobody to fear, that there is no God and that nothing will prevent him from leading a life of pleasure, not only he lost all his pleasures, but all his pleasures turned into torments. Fear of assassination, poisoning, deception, the most terrible crimes in his own family and among the members of his household did not leave him. He suspected any person in all the most terrible intentions, and feared and hated every person, and wife, and a son, and a daughter, and all the people. Even his little grandchildren, whom he loved before, now seemed to him evil animals. It seemed to him that they hated him, just like he hated people. To escape his fear, he did nonstop two things: first, took precautions against all people; second, convinced people that there is God, the judgment of God. He believed that his salvation was in assuring people of that what he did not believe himself. His wealth, which continued to grow, already didn't please but scared him. Family members were his enemies. He didn't even have simple pleasures - eating, drinking, or sleeping. In everything, he suspected evil intents against himself.

That way unhappy Trofim lived for ten more years. His strangeness was visible to everyone, but no one saw his sufferings. And his sufferings were great. His sufferings were, mainly, that his life - he felt - was spoiled by fear, which has seized him, and he couldn't make that life better, couldn't break free from his fears, and in the meantime that, which he was afraid of, approached closer and closer.

So Trofim suffered for twelve years, and once, coming from mass, after having breakfast in his room and drinking wine which he kept locked in his cupboard, he went to sleep and never woke up. The death of Trofim was sudden and easy.

Expensive Trofim's coffin was taken to the cemetery of the Alexander Nevsky Lavra. Behind the coffin, went a crowd of friends, who used to come to rich lunches and dinners of the gold-mining magnate. One priest, at that time famous in St. Petersburg for his gift of eloquence, uttered a word on the cemetery and talked much about virtue, piety and happy life of the deceased. No one but God knew about the Trofim's crime nor about punishment which befell him from the moment when he had lost God in him.